

How the Philadelphia Experiment Worked

By: [Dave Roos](#)



The USS Eldridge (seen in 1944) was allegedly the site of some U.S. Navy experiments in time travel.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS
ADMINISTRATION

It was the summer of 1943, two years into the United States' involvement in World War II, and a bloody sea battle was raging between American destroyers and the famed U-boat submarines of the Nazis. In the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, a newly commissioned destroyer called the USS Eldridge was being equipped with several large generators as part of a top-secret mission to win the Battle of the Atlantic once and for all.

Rumor aboard the ship was that the generators were designed to power a new kind of magnetic field that would make the warship invisible to enemy [radar](#). With the full crew on board, it was time to test the system. In broad daylight, and in plain sight of nearby ships, the switches were thrown on the powerful generators, which hummed into action.

What happened next would baffle scientists and fuel decades of wild speculation. Witnesses describe an eerie green-blue glow surrounding the hull of the ship. Then, instantaneously and inexplicably, the Eldridge disappeared. Not just invisible to radar, but gone — vanished into thin air!

Hours later, there were reports of the Eldridge appearing in the Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Virginia, before reappearing just as suddenly back in Philadelphia. According to classified military reports, members of the Eldridge crew suffered from terrible burns and disorientation. Most shockingly, a few crewmen were found partially embedded in the steel hull of the ship; still alive, but with legs or arms sealed to the deck.

So goes the story of the Philadelphia Experiment, perhaps the most famous and widely retold example of secret government experiments with [teleportation](#) and time travel. More than 70 years later, despite the absence of any physical evidence or corroborating testimony, the Philadelphia Experiment survives as "fact" in the minds of amateur paranormalists and conspiracy theorists.

To understand how the Philadelphia Experiment really worked, we must learn about the men who first brought the closely guarded secret to light, explore the suspicious government response to their revelations and get a very different version of the story from a surviving crewmember of the Eldridge.

The Philadelphia Experiment | CLASSIC



'Call Me Carlos': A Conspiracy Is Born



In a 1951 ceremony at the Boston Naval Shipyard, Massachusetts, the USS Eldridge (DE-173) was transferred to the Royal Hellenic Navy.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Almost everything that we "know" about the Philadelphia Experiment and the alleged teleportation of the USS Eldridge emerged from the mind and pen of a colorful character named Carl M. Allen, better known by his pseudonym Carlos Miguel Allende.

In 1956, Allende sent the first of over 50 handwritten letters to the author and amateur astronomer Morris K. Jessup, who a year earlier had published a self-researched book called "The Case for the UFO" [source: Vallee]. In his letters, Allende criticized

Jessup's naive understanding of unified field theory, which Allende claimed to have been taught by [Albert Einstein](#) himself. A **unified field theory**, which has never been proven (by Einstein or anyone else), attempts to merge the forces of gravity and [electromagnetism](#) into one fundamental field [source: [Sutton](#)].

To prove that a unified field theory existed, Allende offered Jessup his eyewitness account from a nearby ship of the disappearance of the Eldridge from the Philadelphia Naval Yard in 1943. Carlos Allende's letter to Morris Jessup, which explains how the U.S. military used Einstein's revelations to teleport an entire naval destroyer and its crew, registered the first ever mention of the Philadelphia Experiment. No other witnesses from the crew of the Eldridge or nearby ships had come forward in the 13 years since the alleged event.

Jessup attempted a serious investigation of Allende's claims, but grew frustrated with the mysterious letter writer's inability to produce physical evidence. Jessup was ready to drop the investigation entirely when he was contacted by two officers from the Navy's Office of Naval Research (ONR) in 1957 [source: Vallee].

According to an information sheet published by the ONR, the two officers were responding to a strange package that they received in 1956. It contained a copy of Jessup's UFO book annotated by handwritten notes claiming advanced knowledge of physics that linked extraterrestrial technology to breakthroughs in unified field theory [source: [ONR](#)].

Although the scrawled notes were meant to look like they came from three different authors (at least one, perhaps, an alien), Jessup instantly recognized the handwritings as all belonging to Carlos Allende. For unexplained reasons, the ONR officers published 127 copies of the annotated book using a Texas military contractor named Varo Manufacturing. Transcribed copies of the so-called "Varo editions" — whether real or forged — would become prized collector's items for conspiracy theorists [source: Vallee].

Sadly, Jessup's story took a tragic turn. Injured in a car accident and split from his wife, Jessup committed suicide in 1959. Carlos Allende lived until 1994, sporadically

sending letters to anyone who would listen to his fantastical tale of the Philadelphia Experiment [source: Vallee].

The 'Real' Philadelphia Experiment

For decades, Carlos Allende (aka Carl Allen) was the sole "witness" of the allegedly supernatural events surrounding the 1943 Philadelphia Experiment. Carlos claimed to have been stationed on the SS Andrew Furuseth, a vessel docked in the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard with a clear view of the Eldridge when it disappeared.

Much later, after the release of the 1984 film "The Philadelphia Experiment," a man named Al Bielek came forward claiming to have personally taken part in the secret experiment, which he had been [brainwashed](#) to forget. Only after seeing the movie in 1988 did his repressed memories come flooding back [source: Vallee].

Despite the insistent (and constantly evolving) claims of both men, it was the testimony of a third witness that ultimately shed some light on what may have really happened in Philadelphia during that wartime summer of 1943.

In 1994, French-born astrophysicist and ufologist Jacques F. Vallee published an article in the Journal of Scientific Exploration titled "Anatomy of a Hoax: The Philadelphia Experiment Fifty Years Later." In writing a previous article about the Philadelphia Experiment, Vallee asked readers to contact him if they had further information about the alleged event. That's when Vallee received a letter from Edward Dudgeon, who served in the U.S. Navy from 1942 to 1945.

Dudgeon had served on the USS Engstrom, which was dry-docked in the Philadelphia Naval Yard during the summer of 1943 [source: Vallee]. Dudgeon was an electrician in the Navy and had full knowledge of the classified devices that were installed on both his ship and the Eldridge, which he said was there at the same time.

Far from being teleportation engines designed by Einstein (or [aliens](#)), the devices enabled the ships to scramble their magnetic signature using a technique called **degaussing**. The ship were wrapped in large cables and zapped with high-voltage

charges. A degaussed ship wouldn't be invisible to radar, but would be undetectable by the U-boats' magnetic torpedoes.

Dudgeon was familiar with the wild rumors about disappearing ships and mangled crewmen, but credited the fabrications to loose sailor talk about "invisibility" to torpedoes and the peculiarity of the degaussing process. The "green glow" was probably due to an electric storm or St. Elmo's Fire. As for the Eldridge's mysterious appearance in Norfolk and sudden return to Philadelphia, Dudgeon explained that the Navy used inland canals — off-limits to commercial vessels — to make the trip in six hours rather than two days [source: Vallee].

In another turn of events, the [Philadelphia Inquirer](#) reported in 1999 on a reunion of sailors who served on the USS Eldridge in Atlantic City. The sailors said the ship *never* docked in Philadelphia. Indeed, it was in Brooklyn on its supposed date of disappearance. The ship's log confirmed this. Further, the captain said no experiments were ever conducted on the vessel.

Despite the differing accounts, both Dudgeon and the Eldridge crew confirm that nothing otherworldly happened on the ship. Yet, people continue to believe otherwise. We'll look at some reasons why the hoax has endured for more than 70 years.

The Fate of the USS Eldridge

In 1951, the U.S. transferred the ship to Greece where it was renamed the HS Leon and used in joint exercises between the two countries during the Cold War. It was eventually sold for scrap in the 1990s. A very ignoble end [source: [Veronese](#)].

The Philadelphia Experiment Today

Despite its near universal debunking as a hoax, the Philadelphia Experiment endures as a paranormal cultural landmark.

The 1984 movie — based loosely on Carlos Allende's original narrative — was hardly an Oscar contender, but its '80s-era special effects were good enough to plant some indelible images in the moviegoer's mind. One particularly graphic scene near the end of the film depicts a badly burned crewmember writhing on the deck of the Eldridge with half of his body swallowed up in steel.

In his article explaining the stickiness of the Philadelphia Experiment myth, Jacques F. Vallee theorizes that powerful imagery is key to the success of any long-lived [hoax](#). Like the debunked "surgeon's photo" of the Loch Ness Monster or the doctored pictures of the Cottingley fairies, it was the clear mental images of a disappearing ship and the mangled crewmen that helped capture the public's imagination.

The plausibility of the Philadelphia Experiment story is also fortified by a general mistrust of the military and the federal government, which have admitted to carrying out unethical experiments on their own soldiers and citizens. The claims are lent further legitimacy by invoking the names of brilliant scientists like Einstein and associating the secret technology with a scientific theory that remains just out of reach.

Though the [ONR](#) said it has never conducted experiments on invisibility and that such experiments could only happen in science fiction, true believers think this is one more case of the government performing a cover-up.

Even as more evidence has emerged about the true identity of Carlos Allende — a charismatic drifter with a host of mental problems — the Philadelphia Experiment refuses to die. It has even spawned a related myth called the Montauk Project. In this version, set at an Air Force base in the 1980s, the government built on the success of the Philadelphia Experiment to "manipulate the flow of time" [source: Vallee].

For lots more information about unexplained phenomena and contagious [conspiracies](#), check out the related HowStuffWorks articles on the next page.

How many movies were made about the Philadelphia Experiment?

At least three movies have been produced about the Philadelphia Experiment. The first movie was released in 1984 starring Michael Pare, followed by a sequel in 1993. In 2012, another movie based on the urban legend was released, which starred Michael Pare once again.

Did the USS Eldridge really disappear?

It is alleged that the USS Eldridge teleported from Philadelphia to Virginia. However, official records in the archives of the Naval History archives have documented no such event. This urban legend continues to endure without any clear answer.

What happened to the USS Eldridge?

The USS Eldridge was first commissioned for duty on 27 August 1943 and had the task of escorting men and materials to North Africa and Southern Europe. Eventually, the ship was transferred to Greece and served as Leon (D54). It was finally decommissioned in 1992 and sold as scrap.

What is the Montauk Project?

The Montauk Project is a spin-off conspiracy theory based on the hype generated by the Philadelphia Experiment. It explores popular topics such as time travel, mind control and teleportation. It was authored by Preston Nichols in his book series "The Montauk Project."â€

Who is Carl M. Allen?

Carl M. Allen, also known as Carlos Miguel Allende, is the brains behind the conspiracy theories around the Philadelphia Experiment. He claims to have witnessed the disappearance of the Eldridge. There are no witnesses who can confirm his accounts.

Lots More Information

Author's Note: How the Philadelphia Experiment Worked

You can't keep a good hoax down. The story of the Philadelphia Experiment has all of the trademark signs of a lie: a single witness, a secret government plot, pseudoscientific revelations possibly from alien sources ... It's a wonder that this thing ever caught on, let alone endured for decades. The Internet has certainly done its job. There are dozens of dubious websites dedicated to the "hidden facts" that the "government doesn't want you to know" about the Philadelphia Experiment and the Montauk Project. Anyone who dares to debunk the hoaxers is "debunked" themselves — allegedly unmasked as a CIA stooge or a paid accomplice. I can only hope that somewhere in the bowels of cyberspace, there's a brand-new article debunking me.

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